

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

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FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7721

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1790

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJECT: MALAISE IN MADAGASCAR

1. IN TANANARIVE IN RECENT WEEKS EMBASSY HAS NOTED STEADILY MOUNTING CHORUS OF COMPLAINTS BY MALAGASY, CENTERED ON INTENSIFYING ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND ALLEGED BREAKDOWNS OF PUBLIC ORDER. APART FROM SOARING PRICES AND UNEMPLOYMENT, RICE, MADAGASCAR'S BASIC FOOD-STUFF, IS AGAIN IN SHORT SUPPLY IN THE CAPITAL, WITH POP-ULACE REQUIRED TO QUEUE UP DAILY FOR LIMITED RATIONS.

2. DURING PAST FEW WEEKS TANANARIVE HAS BEEN SWEPT BY RUMORS OF POSSIBLE "EVENTS" OR DISTURBANCES TO TAKE PLACE OCTOBER 25-26. IN ANTICIPATION OF TROUBLE, STORES HAVE BEEN EMPTIED OF MANY BASICS BY HOARDERS, AND MANY MALAGASY ARE BUTTONING UP IN THEIR HOMES. ADDING TO ATMOSPHERE OF FOREBODING, THE CAPITAL HAS RECENTLY BEEN COVERED BY PALL OF SMOKE AND ASHES FROM BRUSH FIRES RAGING IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE. WHILE IT IS TRADITIONAL FOR MALAGASY PEASANTS TO BURN DEAD GRASS THIS TIME OF YEAR, ALL SOURCES REPORT BRUSH FIRES HAVE NEVER BEFORE BEEN SO INTENSE OR DESTRUCTIVE. FIRES ARE WIDELY ATTRIBUTED TO SOME SORT OF UNSPECIFIED PROTEST AGAINST GOVERNMENT, AND INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF BREAKDOWN IN PUBLIC ORDER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. MANY SOURCES HAVE ALSO REMARKED ON INTENSIFICATION OF
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CRIME, INCLUDING HITHERTO UNKNOWN HIGHWAY ROBBERIES ON THE

ROAD BETWEEN AIRPORT AND TANANARIVE.

3. COMMENT: IN A MILITARY REGIME SUCH AS MADAGASCAR'S UNDER DIDIER RATSIRAKA, POPULAR SUPPORT, OR SUPPORT OF THE EDUCATED IN THE CAPITAL, IS CLEARLY NOT ESSENTIAL TO THE GOVERNMENT'S TENURE. NONETHELESS, WE BELIEVE GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF MOUNTING MALAISE AND APPREHENSION IN TANANARIVE WORTH REMARKING ON.

4. MANY MALAGASY INITALLY SUPPORTED RATSIRAKA'S NATIONALISTIC MOVES AGAINST FRENCH INTERESTS, BUT NOW SEEM BEWILDERED BY HIS MARXIST "SOCIALIST REVOLUTION" UNVEILED IN AUGUST, AND ARE MOST CONCERNED FOR EVIDENCE OF DETERIORATING ECONOMY. RATSIRAKA HIMSELF HAS RARELY BEEN SEEN OR HEARD IN PUBLIC SINCE EARLY SEPTEMBER, ALTHOUGH HE REPORTEDLY MAINTAINS TIGHT CONTROL OF ALL SIGNIFICANT DECISION-MAKING IN THE GOVERNMENT.DE SANTILLANA

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